

Lawsuits And Lawyers Dominate Assembly Meeting

Friday, 20 June 2008

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Jay Barrett/KMXT

The ongoing internal legal problems of the Kodiak Island Borough Assembly continued at last night's meeting. Jay Barrett has more.

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Though no direct mention was made of the latest lawsuit against the borough — that brought by three assembly members against the mayor and three of their colleagues — lawsuits and legal representation was the dominant topic at the assembly meeting last night.

Two former assembly members spoke up at the beginning of the meeting urging the assembly to pay the outstanding legal fees for Tom Abell, Reed Oswalt and Louise Stutes in the Mel Stephens attendance case. They were Stephens and Barbara Williams.

Williams said that if there had been better communication between the assembly and the public last fall, the lawsuit by Stephens, which the borough lost, might never have been filed. She criticized the assembly for failing to override Mayor Jerome Selby's veto of a resolution paying legal fees.

-- (Barbara
1 34
sec "and
paying their modest legal fees.)

Williams also said that Assemblywoman Chris Lynch's urging of a recall petition might

result in different members of the assembly being removed than she may have had in mind.

Stephens

said the legal fees for Abell, Oswald and Stutes could have been paid without assembly action by Borough Manager Rick Gifford – and that they can still be:

-- (Mel mgr
pay 1 47 sec “…
of the constitution demands no less.”)

A public

hearing was held later in the meeting on an ordinance sponsored by Assemblywoman Pat Branson that would require assembly approval for payment of legal fees with public money if an assembly member gets an outside attorney. Stephens, himself an attorney, did not think highly of the concept:

-- (mel
lawsuit 21
sec “…
you should vote this down immediately.”)

Branson,

though, was undeterred:

-- (pat
atty 28
sec “…
spending dollars or wanting a bill paid.”)

Assemblyman

Oswald was irate at the ordinance, and compared it to a dystopian George Orwell novel:

-- (reed
1984 42
sec “…
the next thing that we’ll have are thought police.”)

In the end, consideration of the ordinance was postponed until the assembly meeting of August 7th. In asking for the postponement, Abell said the time could be used for assembly members to come up with an ordinance they all would be more comfortable with.

There was no discussion of the 200-thousand dollar-plus lawsuit Abell, Oswald and Stutes filed earlier this month against the borough, Mayor Selby and assembly members Branson, Lynch and Sue Jeffrey. Assemblyman Jerrol Friend is not named in the suit.

’m Jay
Barrett.